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PROCESS OF WOOD-CUT PRINTING
EXPLAINED



SMITHSONIAN
INSTITUTION
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Freer Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

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**PROCESSES OF WOOD-CUT
PRINTING EXPLAINED.**

The art of wood-cut printing has been practised in Japan since the eighteenth century, but it made the first really tangible advance with the development of the Ukiyoe school of painters, and during the last few decades has been extensively applied for the reproduction of famous ancient masterpieces. The successive improvements introduced in this essentially Japanese art now place it beyond all possibility of outrivalry by artists of other countries.

The prints made by this process reproduce the slightest touch of the brush and the most delicate shades of colours in the originals, the result being such as can hardly be attained by lithographs. It can be truly said of Oriental paintings that except by this wood-cut process a faithful representation of the originals is impossible. The method of engraving and rubbing demands the utmost skill in the artizans, nor can the difficulties of the modus operandi be adequately measured by the casual observer of the printed picture. We propose, therefore, to give here a brief explanation

of the process in the hope of making the real value of Japanese wood-cut printing more widely known.

The blocks are usually made from cherry-wood, but where very fine cutting is needed willow-wood is sometimes used. For each colour and for each shade of the same colour a separate block is provided, and for this reason the number of blocks used for a single picture often reaches several hundreds. A drawing of the ground lines is first made, with outlines of the colour scheme, and from this a block is cut. Having obtained the ground block, a new one for each colour is cut. Since the blocks are liable to swell or shrink with varying atmospheric conditions, it is very important to examine them carefully before going to press, and dry or moisten them as the case may demand. This part of the process requires a great amount of skill in the artizan. Several blocks are sometimes required to print one colour, as it is not always possible to print a whole mass of colour in one shade and at the same time, but a series of blocks has to be employed to produce the desired effect. Laying a single colour on the block in the right manner itself constitutes a difficulty. The usual process of printing begins with the lightest colour and proceeds on to thickest ones, and

it varies according to the nature of the colours used in the originals. The rapidity with which colours, sometimes single and sometimes double, dry, must also be taken into consideration, for it is one of the conditions that decide the order or succession of prints. The delicate shading is done with a brush. After the colour has been laid on the block with a brush, the paper is rubbed from the back with an instrument called "*baren*," made of a piece of wood covered with a bamboo sheath, which is slightly moistened with oil to make it soft and smooth. A specimen copy of the finished picture is kept before him by the artizan, who is extremely careful to make each copy follow the sample picture in every detail. Only water colours were used till a few years ago, but it has recently been found possible to employ even white lead. Further we have made experiments that have resulted in our being enabled to use verdigri and Prussian blue, and there is now hardly any pigment that cannot be successfully employed in our wood-cut printing.

Every variety of our pictorial art productions can be reproduced by our method of wood-cut printing, which has made a signal developement within the past few decades. The shades produced on our prints are

precisely the same as in the originals in tone and materials used, the latter including gold and silver dust, Prussian blue, and verdigris. As a matter of fact our method of reproduction increases the difficulties of the work, but we point with pride to the result, the original pictures reproduced without the slightest deviation in technique or colouring.

March 10th, 1916.

The Shimbi Shoin,
Tokyo.



No. 1: First Colour.

第一 色



No. 1: Print from First Block.

摺一第

No. 2 : Second Colour.

色二第



No. 2: Print from Second Block.

第二 摂

No. 3: Third Colour.

色三第



No. 3: Print from Third Block.

第三第



No. 4: Fourth Colour.

色四第



No. 4: Print from Fourth Block.

摺四第



No. 5: Fifth Colour.

色五第



No. 5: Print from Fifth Block.

第五摺



No. 6: Sixth Colour.

色六第



No. 6 : Print from Sixth Block.

第六摺



No. 7: Seventh Colour.

色七第



No. 7: Print from Seventh Block.

擗七第



No. 8: Eighth Colour.

色八第



No. 8: Print from Eighth Block.

第 八 捧



No. 9: Ninth Colour.

色九第



No. 9: Print from Ninth Block.

第九摺



No. 10: Tenth Colour.

第十色



No. 10: Print from Tenth Block.

第十摺



No. 11: Eleventh Colour.

第十一色



No. 11: Print from Eleventh Block.

第十一十摺



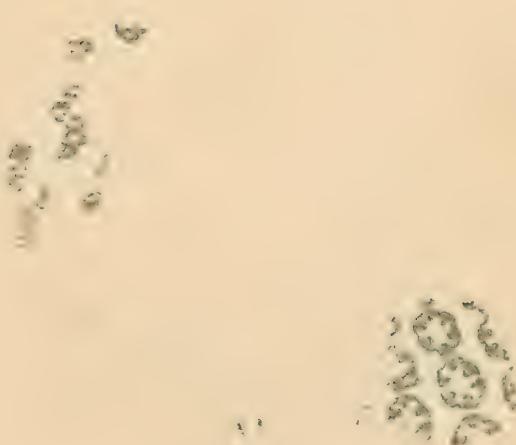
No. 12: Twelfth Colour.

色二十第



No. 12: Print from Twelfth Block.

第二十摺



No. 13: Thirteenth Colour.

第十三色



No. 13: Print from Thirteenth Block.

摺三十第

No. 14: Fourteenth Colour.

色四十第



No. 14: Print from Fourteenth Block.

第四十摺



No. 15: Fifteenth Colour.

色五十第



No. 15: Print from Fifteenth Block.

第五十攬



No. 16: Sixteenth Colour.

色六十第



No. 16: Print from Sixteenth Block.

第六十擡



No. 17: Print from Seventeenth Block.

第七十摺

No. 18: Eighteenth Colour.

第十八色



No. 18: Print from Eighteenth Block.

摺八十第



No. 19: Nineteenth Colour.

色九十九



No. 19: Print from Nineteenth Block.

第十九圖



No. 20: Twentieth Colour.

色十二第



No. 20: Print from Twentieth Block.

第十二摺

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